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Stortford — major title contenders

WITH last Saturday's Amateur Cup final triumph and a last minute victory at Tooting and Mitcham tucked under their belts, Bishop's Stortford faced one-time Rothmans Isthmian League leaders Dulwich Hamlet at Champion Hill on Thursday night for one of the most important matches of the season.

Having beaten Hendon 2-1 on Tuesday, no doubt many Wycombe fans were hoping for a similar result from Dulwich. But it was not to be, Stortford picking up three invaluable points from a ragged match.

The sides had to cope with a rain drenched pitch which was not helped by a muddy patch down the middle, making entertaining football almost impossible. Another factor that hindered what could have been a thrilling top of the table clash was the performance of referee, Mr. C. I. Boswell.

During the first half, there were numerous lunging tackles, many of which went unpunished by the referee. But in the second half, in an effort to curb these tackles, Mr. Boswell intervened at the slightest hint of a foul and as a result, the game was never allowed to flow.

The first half was highlighted by a disallowed Stortford goal and the appearance of their manager Ted Hardy on the pitch.

In the 19th minute, Tony Bass thought he had scored a perfect goal. Right back Tony Gibson made another one of his familiar

runs up the wing before centring for Bass to head home. But the referee disallowed the goal for a pushing offence by Bass. This decision, added to a fierce tackle by Peter Smith which resulted in Stortford's talented Dennis Murphy being carried off, annoyed Ted Hardy to such an extent that he walked onto the

pitch both efforts by Smith and Bladon were brilliantly kept out by Terry Moore, the Stortford keeper. Other than these opportunities, Dulwich's attacks were effectively stifled by Still.

The goal that finally clinched the points for the visitors came in the 72nd minute. Stortford worked the ball up the middle

ly stood up, smiled and then in a defiant gesture stuck two fingers up into the air. However, managing only a few paces, he buckled over and eventually needed treatment.

Although it was difficult to judge a team's performance in such terrible conditions, Stortford must now rank as a real threat to Wanderers' title hopes with so many of their remaining matches at home.

John Still in the visitors' defence hardly put a foot wrong against the unimaginative Dulwich forwards, and he must be the main reason why the side have only conceded 19 goals in the league. But it could be a different story when he comes up against forwards with more class — such as Wanderers' Keith Searle and Tony Horsemann who put a goal apiece past him at Loakes Park earlier this season.

Stortford's main striker Bass often looks slow and cumbersome but he showed against Dulwich that, given the space, he is a deadly finisher. Wycombe must not give him the room when they clash with Stortford. Right back Tony Gibson could also provide a threat with his overlaps as effectively as he did on Thursday. So with Stortford still on the crest of a wave after their Amateur Cup conquest, the title race is really hotting up.

DULWICH HAMLET: Thomas, Baker, Rogers, Bulman, Grose, Smith, Bladon, Jelly, Pudney (sub. Drake 74 mins.), Barker, O'Rourke.

BISHOP'S STORTFORD: Moore, Gibson, Coombes, Lawrence, Still, Payne, Leakey, Dear, Bass, Smith, Murphy (sub. Scott 28 mins.).

Referee: C. I. Boswell.

Half-time: 0-0. **Goalscorers:** Stortford — Bass (72 mins.).

Dulwich Hamlet 0, Bishop's Stortford 1

WITH the Rothmans Isthmian League Division One title race now approaching its climax, Mid-week sent reporter TERRY REEVE along to see one of Wycombe Wanderers' closest rivals, Bishop's Stortford in action at Dulwich Hamlet on Thursday. Here's his report.

pitch to remonstrate with Dulwich captain Trevor Bladon, before having a row with officials in the Dulwich dug out.

Apart from these incidents, there was little else to interest the crowd, who were obviously distressed by the lack of goalmouth incidents. Besides the disallowed goal, Stortford came closest to scoring when a fine effort by substitute Paul Scott was cleared off the line by Steve Rogers.

As the game progressed, it was evident that Dulwich were going to have to change their tactics to break down the impregnable visitors defence. They used the wings sensibly to save becoming bogged down in the mud but all Bladon's crosses were promptly cut out by Stortford's centre half John Still who mastered the home attack almost single handed.

Dulwich created two good chances early in the second half

again, as they had done for most of the game and John Dear slipped a splendid pass through to Bass on the corner of the 18 yard box. The goal poaching forward stole several yards before slotting a neat shot under the body of Dulwich 'keeper Alan Thomas.

This goal virtually wrapped up the result for the Hertfordshire side and but for a great save by Thomas from a first time shot by Dear, they would have won by a more convincing scoreline. There was one black mark on Stortford's performance, however—the booking of Martin Smith after Fred Pudney was felled before a free-kick against Stortford was taken. It was the Bishop's third booking of the term.

Bass added some humour to this drab match in the second half. Having caught the full force of the ball in his stomach he fell to the ground. But when the crowd jeered, he immediate-